The Judgment of Sister Agnes
Chapter 1: The Fall
By Yu May

The candleglow shimmered in Agnes' eyes. "But, Sister Beatrice…it's the communion wine."

Beatrice shook her head, her jowls wagging from the exertion. "It hasn't been consecrated, Sister Agnes. So that means it's just ordinary wine."

"But still, it seems…sinful. At the very least, it's stealing, isn't it?"

Beatrice twisted a corkscrew into one of the dusty bottles. "This wine was donated to the abbey so that we may drink it. As the Proverb says, 'Go forth, then. Eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God long ago approved what you do.'"

"But that's from Ecclesiastes."

Beatrice pulled the cork from the bottle, ducking as the cork went flying over her head. "You worry too much, Sister Agnes. You're not a snot-nosed oblate any more. You should enjoy the finer things the monastic life has to offer."

Beatrice pulled out two tin cups, and filled them to the brim.

Agnes stared at her reflection in the red violet pool. "But…I've only ever had a sip before, when I take the Eucharist."

"Well, if a sip of wine is good for your soul, imagine what a whole bottle will do for you."

Agnes shook her head, as she took her first sip. "Oh, no. We can't possibly drink the whole bottle…but just a small cup shouldn't hurt."

But after Agnes had drunk her first cup, Beatrice argued that it would be a sin to let the rest of the bottle go to waste. And before Agnes had finished her second cup, Beatrice had taught her to play an old tavern game: Pass the Cup. And before they'd finished the first game, Beatrice had to open a second bottle. And by then, it seemed to Agnes that it would be a sin to leave Beatrice behind to drink a second bottle, all by herself.

The next morning, one of the orphans living at the abbey as an oblate heard singing coming from the cellar, and found Sister Agnes and Sister Beatrice giggling in a pool of spilled wine. The orphan had run straight to the Mother Superior: Abbess Hilda.

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The cloister was silent, save for the faint drip of rain falling from the eaves. A rain drop blew through the window, and plopped heavily onto one of the flagstones in the cool chamber. Seated on a low wooden stool in the center of the sparse room, Sister Agnes shivered, and pulled her mantle tightly around her. Even in the summer, the stone rooms could get frigid on a rainy morning. A meager tallow candle was the only source of warmth for the room.

Nevertheless, Agnes felt a bead of sweat on her brow, and as she tried to wipe it away, she realized her habit was still askew, letting a few curls of her red hair escape. Agnes twisted the coarse wool of her habit in her fists. At eighteen years, Agnes was the youngest novice apprentice at the Abbey of Saint Etheldreda, and at the moment, Agnes was sure she was the most foolish.

"O Lord, have mercy on me, a wretched sinner," she thought, her lips moving soundlessly as she hung her head. "*I have profaned Thy holy wine, Thy sacred blood. I am no better than a tavern wench, a stumbling drunkard.*"

Agnes heard a sharp slam, and sat up, wondering if the Mother Superior had arrived. But as she peeked out the window, Agnes discovered one of her sisters, striking a rug with a carpet beater far below. With a sigh, Agnes settled back onto her stool. "Agnes, you goose," she muttered aloud, her voice petulant.

"Why did you do it? Why did you listen to Sister Beatrice and her daft games?"

"Oh, Beatrice, you serpent," Agnes hissed under her breath, her tone sharp. "You said it would be no sin, that the Lord would laugh with us!"

But even as Agnes spoke, remorse gnawed at her insides. Beatrice had not forced the cup to her lips. "*I chose to drink. I chose to laugh,"* thought Agnes.

Agnes reached for her rosary, and prayed. "Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa," she muttered. The wooden prayer beads had worn smooth from daily prayer, in the years since she had been brought to the Abbey as an orphan. But at the moment, the small, familiar beads felt more like heavy millstones, weighing her down.

"God forgive me! I didn't know the wine would muddle my head so. I didn't know I'd feel so…so wretched."

Agnes wondered what punishment awaited her. Even before becoming a novitiate, Agnes had been no stranger to strict discipline. But she had not outgrown the need for punishment, just by growing older. If anything, the Mother Superior expected more of the older girls. Though Agnes had not taken her formal vows of poverty and chastity, she was nearing the

end of her apprenticeship, and was no stranger to the lash. “Mortification of the flesh,” groaned Agnes, stroking the back of her shoulder

Agnes’s stomach churned as she imagined the birch rod, its thin, whippy branches biting into her flesh. She had seen Sister Margaret birched last spring for neglecting her chores–twelve sharp strokes across her bare back and hindquarters, each one drawing a stifled cry from the stolid, middle aged woman.

Margaret’s welts had lingered for days, red and angry, clearly visible every time Margaret bent to scrub the chapel floor.

Agnes shuddered, her fingers digging into her back. Agnes had only been punished with the birch, once, at age seven, and only with seven strokes, for roughhousing with the orphan boys too near the cloister. “Will it be the birch for me? Or worse?”

Her mind conjured up darker memories. She remembered Sister Edith, who had been caught stealing a loaf of bread from the kitchen two years ago. The Abbess had ordered her flogged with a leather strap in the chapter house, before the entire community. Agnes could still hear the whistle of the strap, the sickening crack as it met Edith’s skin, the nun’s gasps turning to sobs. The sisters had watched in silence, their faces pale, their eyes fixed on the spectacle. Edith had worn a coarse penitential shift for a month after, her movements slow and pained. Agnes’s breath hitched. “Surely…not the strap,” she whispered, trembling. “Not for wine? Not for a game!”

But Agnes wasn’t so sure. There was Sister Clare, made to kneel on dried peas for hours for gossiping during a time of silent meditation, until her knees were bruised and swollen. Then there was Sister Juliana, confined to a cell on bread and water for a week for stealing bread from the larter.

Agnes’s imagination ran wild, painting scenes of herself lying prostrate before the altar, scourged like a martyr. Or maybe she would be banished to the scullery for a year, until her hands were red raw from scrubbing pots. Agnes stood from her stool, clasping her hands together. “O Holy Virgin, intercede for me. I am but a foolish girl. I meant no blasphemy.”

Agnes’ sandals scuffed the stone as she pacing the small chamber in a tight circle. The cool air stung her lungs. “*What will the others think of me now? Will they whisper behind their hands, call me a drunkard, a scandal?”* she thought.

Her cheeks burned as she imagined being escorted out the Monastery. All her years spent in prayer and devotion, learning to read and write, desperate to prove herself worthy of taking the vows. All undone in a single night of folly. “I’m no nun. I’m a child playing at holiness, and now I’ll pay for it.”

Agnes tried to smooth her habit with trembling hands. "*If I look contrite, perhaps she'll be lenient. If I weep, if I beg…*" she thought.

But the Mother Superior's face rose in her mind: those piercing gray eyes, that mouth set like iron. Agnes's knees weakened, and she sank back onto the stool, her heart racing. "O Lord, give me strength. Let me bear what comes with humility. Let me not shame Thee further."

A sudden sound broke the silence: a sharp, deliberate knock at the door. Agnes froze, her breath catching in her throat. The candle flame stuttered, and blew out. Agnes' head swam, hearing a far-away thumping in her eardrums, and a cold dread deep in her bones. The Mother Superior, Abbess Hilda, had come to deal with little Agnes.

Just as Agnes reached out to open the door, Abbess Hilda let herself in, brusquely. With a squeal, Agnes leapt back from the door, like a doe. Abbess Hilda tensed, and held up a hand to her ear. "Peace, child."

Agnes exhaled, feeling relief wash over her, before she spotted what the Abbess was carrying in her other hand: a bundle of birches, tightly bound with twine. Agnes felt a jolt of terror travel up her spine, and backed away, clutching her rosary with one hand, and covering her backside with her other hand. Agnes felt her throat tighten. "*The birch. Sweet Jesu, it's to be the birch,"* she thought, screaming internally.

As Abbess Hilda released her grip on the birches, and they dangled at her side from her belt. Agnes thought Abbess Hilda strangely resembled a knight, ready to draw a sword from its scabbard to punish the wicked. With an effort, Agnes forced her mouth to move. "Where do you want me positioned for my whipping, Mother Superior?"

Hilda glanced down at her birch bundle. "Whipping? Oh, goodness, child, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Please, sit. We'll come to the matter of penance later."

As Hilda hung the birch bundle from a hook on the wall, Agnes relaxed slightly, and sank into her seat. Agnes found it difficult to take her eyes off the birch bundle, even as Hilda marched to tower over her. Agnes held up her hands. "Mother Superior, I…I…"

Hilda raised a single finger to shush Agnes. "No. I will speak first. You have shamed yourself, Sister, and this holy house. To profane the sacred wine of communion, with a peasant's drinking game? You, a bride of Christ, stumbling and laughing like a common alewife? I am grieved, Agnes, and disappointed."

Dimly, Agnes remembered something Beatrice had said. “But, it wasn’t consecrated. It was just ordinary wine, not the blood of Christ.”

“Oh? Were you planning to save that blasphemy for the second round of drinking games?”

Agnes’ face flushed red, but this time with temper, not shame. She had earned more than her fair share of spankings from the Abbess during her catechism classes, though Agnes would have been the first to admit that every spanking she earned was more than fair. “I’d never do that! Do you take me for a demoniac?"

“I take you for a foolish girl. The wine may not have been consecrated, but it was still a sacrilege to steal it. Or do you deny your guilt?”

Agnes shook her head, her voice thick. Somehow, her tongue felt heavy. “No, Mother…I knew it was foolish. I just didn’t think the wine would make me so giddy. Sister Beatrice said a few sips wouldn’t hurt.”

“Never mind what Sister Beatrice said. What did you say to Sister Beatrice?”

“That…that it felt like a sin to steal wine from the cellar.”

“And why do you suppose it *felt* like a sin?”

Agnes struggled to maintain eye contact with Abbess Hilda, but finally, Agnes hung her head. “Because…because it *was* a sin.”

“Meaning, in the first place, you acted against conscience. And in the second place, you didn’t drink a few sips. You carried on, long after you’d drunk a whole bottle yourself. One sin, leading to another. You were not merely foolish. You were willful in your trespass.”

Anges felt a tear trickle down her nose, and tried to hide it. But her sniffle gave her away. “I’m…sniff …I’m so sorry, Mother Abbess.”

Abbess Hilda nodded. “There’s a beginning to the path to repentance. Now, it’s true that you were led astray by Sister Beatrice. She ought to have known better, as your elder. But you also need to govern yourself. If you are to serve the Body of Christ, you must flee from temptation, not dance with it, to see just how close it can take you to perdition. What do you think is worse? A lashing with this birch bundle, or to be cast into the lake of fire?”

Agnes flinched as she glanced at the birches. “It is better to suffer any pains rather than be thrown to hell.”

Hilda played with the birches, then turned back to Agnes, her voice surprisingly soft. “Yes, Agnes. But know this: Our Lord is merciful. Do you recall the story of the sinful woman who wept at Christ’s feet?”

Agnes blinked, caught off guard by Hilda’s gentleness. “Y-yes, Mother. She anointed him with an alabaster jar of ointment. It was a kingly gift.”

“Yes, but there’s more to the story. The Savior was visiting the house of Simon the Pharisee. When Simon saw the woman weeping at the feet of Jesus, he said to himself, ‘If this man were really a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.’ Yet Jesus knew what was in Simon’s heart, and told him the parable of the two debtors. Because the woman had been forgiven for a greater sin, for a greater debt, she showed greater love to the forgiver of sins. And so the Lord told her, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’”

Although she knew all the words, Agnes felt like she was hearing the story for the first time. “Then, how can I be forgiven?”

“By your faith in He who has the power to forgive all tresspasses. Your sin is grievous, but God’s mercy is boundless. You must seek penance with a contrite heart, offer your sorrow to Him, and He will cleanse you.”

“Then…you aren’t going to cast me out from the abbey? Please, I have no other family!””

The rain seemed to hang in the air, out of deference to Abbess Hilda as she weighed her judgment. “Of course we won’t cast you out. Not unless you’ve changed your mind about taking up your holy vows.”

Agnes flew from her stool, kneeling before her Abbess. “No! I will fulfill my vows! I do repent, I swear it. I’ll pray, I’ll fast, I’ll scrub the chapel floor for a month, only…”

Agnes eyed the birch bundle hanging on the wall. “Only…perhaps, Mother, if I’m truly penitent, might I be spared the birch? I’ve learned my lesson, I promise. Could not my sorrow be enough?”

Abbess Hilda’s mouth tightened. “Agnes, do not presume to barter with your penance, as if it were a market stall. You’ve offered words of contrition, but words will not undo the scandal you have brought upon yourself, and your fellow sisters. You’ve made a mockery of our vows. For you to be accepted as our sister, you must offer public penance, child.”

Agnes winced as she was called a child. “I…I didn’t mean to…yes, Mother. I’ll do anything.”

“The Scriptures teach us: ‘do not scorn the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves.’ So too does the Church, as your mother, correct you for your good. The birch is not cruelty, Agnes, but a loving chastisement, to guide you back to righteousness. Without discipline, your soul might stray further, and I will not have that on my conscience.”

Agnes swallowed hard, her bravado crumbling. The Abbess’s words settled over her like a weight, and she saw the truth in them, though it stung. Agnes felt small as she released her grip on the Abbess habit. “Yes. I understand, Mother. I was wrong to ask. I’ll submit to your judgment…I’m sorry.”

Abbess Hilda nodded, her smile strangely beautiful, and relit the lone tallow candle on the wall. “Good, child. Your heart is contrite, and that is well. In that case, let us begin.”

With calm, deliberate steps, Abbess Hilda retrieved the birch bundle from the wall. “Sister Agnes, I pray that you let this penance purify you, like a fire which burns away the dross, and let the stripes serve as a reminder to guard your actions henceforth.”

Agnes caught her breath, her eyes fixing on the birch rods in the Abbess’s hands. The slender branches gleamed faintly in the candlelight, their tips swaying slightly, and she could almost feel the sting they promised. Agnes’ heart pounded, fear and resolve warring within her, as she braced herself for what was to come. “Yes, Mother Superior. Withhold not the rod of correction from me.”

[End of Chapter 1]

The Judgment of Sister Agnes
Chapter 2: Confession and Absolution

Mother Hilda gestured to the wooden stool with the birches. “Very well, Sister Agnes. Rest across the stool, lying on your stomach… oh, and bare your bottom first, of course!”

For emphasis, Mother Hilda tapped Agnes across the seat of her habit. Agnes stiffened, and reflexively clutched her hindquarters. “Is this…really necessary?”

As her mind raced, Agnes forced herself to grin. “After all…is not modesty a Christian virtue?”

Mother Hilda swung the birches with the sort of precise control most swordsmen dream of achieving. But instead of striking Agnes across the behind, she instead snapped them against Agnes’ bosom. Agnes felt the rough bark of the birches tickling her under the chin, as Mother Hilda forced her to look up to meet her gaze. “Don’t be childish. You’ve been birched before. You know if I birch you across clothing, a stray splinter could snag the fabric. Can’t risk giving you an infection. Besides, the indignity you feel is precisely the point. There is no better cure to pride and folly than a birching on the bare. Humility is learned through submission, and you will learn it now. Just as all our sins will be laid bare on judgment day…so too must your sinful little bottom be laid bare for birching. Do as you're told, child.”

Agnes swallowed a lump in her throat, clutching the skirt of her habit. “Yes, Mother Hilda.”

After hiking the skirt of her woolen habit up and over her backside, Agnes reached under the skirt of her linen shift to reach her undergarments. Unlike modern underpants, the undergarments of the middle ages were often a simple linen band, tied around her waist by a cord of hemp. Sometimes, women wore only a simple shift, but Agnes had been a rambunctious child, and preferred to wear a linen wrap along with her shift, so as to always preserve her modesty.

Just as Agnes was mentally preparing herself to tug the undergarments down, and expose herself, Mother Hilda cleared her throat. “I don’t think you’ll need your hose, dear. They’ll just get in the way.”

Glancing down, Agnes pouted as she remembered she’d worn leg-coverings today, thanks to the peculiarly chilly morning air this summer. Her fingers trembling, Agnes undid both garters, and let them drop to her ankles. After stepping out of her sandals and hose, Agnes folded them neatly, thinking about the frigid touch of the stone floor against her bare feet.

Then, Agnes had to lift her skirt all over again, and found it was no easier to do it the second time. Finally, Agnes worked up the courage to tuck her thumbs into the waistline of her linen undergarment and roll it down to just below her bottom. As the linen wrapped taut around the rope, it held together securely, rather than dropping away.

Mother Hilda pinched the undergarments, just enough so that when she released them, they snapped against Agnes' lower bottom. "All the way off, Agnes. No half-measures."

Agnes half-suppressed a whining moan, before she quickly tugged off her undergarments and tossed them aside to join her shoes and leggings. Unable to look Mother Hilda in the eye, Agnes approached the bench, feeling the rough wool skirt tickle her flesh as she clenched her buttocks. Finally, Agnes steeled her breath, and lifted the woolen skirt for a third time, exposing her backside to the cool air. Agnes felt like she was repeating the same passion play all over again from the beginning, like walking through her own version of the Stations of the Cross. *The Baring of Sister Agnes.*

As Agnes settled onto her stomach, she found she had to nudge forward to support her weight on the tiny stool, letting her hips rest on the seat, while her elbows and knees supported her against the floor. The hem of her woolen skirt flopped down against the back of her head, revealing her lower back. With a pang of humiliation, Agnes quickly pressed her knees together, ignoring the stone digging into her kneecaps. Agnes was sure that any physical discomfort was better than having to expose her privates to the Mother Superior, or so she thought.

Taking soft steps, Mother Hilda took Agnes by surprise as she glided to her side, then patted Agnes' upturned buttocks with the birch bundle. "For the foolishness of listening to Sister Beatrice, rather than your own conscience, a simple spanking will suffice. Twelve strokes, one for each of the disciples who served our Lord. May they serve as keen reminders of your error, and act to discipline you back toward the narrow path of wisdom."

Finally, Agnes gathered the courage to look across her shoulder at Mother Hilda, who towered over her. "T-twelve strokes? But last time, I received only six?"

With an impatient sigh, Mother Hilda tapped Agnes's bottom sharply, and glided the birch bundle across her target, letting Agnes feel the rough, abrasive texture. "When you were a child, I dealt with you in the manner appropriate for a child. But, now you are a young woman, and I must deal with you more sternly."

Agnes tightened her mouth as she felt the birches scratching across her hindquarters. "B-But–"

Mother Hilda silenced Agnes with three sharp taps. "Just for that, I'm adding a thirteenth stroke, for showing such cheek. I suppose the thirteenth stroke can represent Judas the betrayer...which reminds me. This punishment is *only* the penalty for your foolishness. Stealing from the cellar is another matter, and will require a second punishment, in the full presence of the abbey. But that matter will have to be discussed with the elder sisters."

Agnes' eyes went wide, and as she started to tremble, she shook her head. "There's *more?* Oh, please, Mother Superior! Have mercy! I cannot bear this shame!"

Mother Hilda delivered a practice stroke, using a full motion of her arm, but checking her blow at the last moment, so that the birches bounced off of Agnes's beautiful, bountiful bubble butt. "Nevertheless, this Cross of shame is yours to bear, and bear it you must…in more sense than one. You said you wished to repent, Little Sister, and that is a hopeful sign. But now you must actually begin to do the hard work of repentance. You must endure what must be endured, until you reach *the end*." After adding a final series of love taps against Agnes' rear end for emphasis, Hilda raised the birch high, and administered the first true stroke. Agnes saw it coming, and twisted her face away, shutting her eyes tight, before the first spank landed.

Agnes didn't feel the pain immediately. She heard the whistling whoosh and heavy thwack, and felt her body jolt forward from the impact, before the sensation of the prickling sting finally seemed to stumble forward and demand her attention. Agnes caught herself on her elbows, and suddenly became painfully aware of how awkward her position was. Her lower back was already trembling from the strain. "Aag-guh!"

The birch bundle easily covered a wide area, leaving a fiery pattern of soft pink marks across the center of Agnes' buttocks. As Agnes became fully aware of the rising pain, she writhed her legs slightly, still keeping her thighs pressed tight together. Agnes moaned. "Oooh!"

The combined effect of her elbows, knees, lower back, and bottom all acting as separate distractions was too much. Precisely at the moment the pain of the first stroke reached its peak, Mother Hilda landed the second stroke, and Agnes flailed her arms and legs wildly. As the stool rocked precariously, Agnes dropped her head, and thrust her hands behind her back to shield her bottom. "Noooooooo!"

Before Agnes could attempt an escape, Mother Hilda grasped both of Agnes's wrists with one hand, pressing the birch bundle down against Agnes' bright pink bottom to pin her against the stool. The result was that Agnes was forced to kiss the floor as her arms were lifted up behind her. As Agnes rolled her face from side to side, she felt her burning cheeks pressing flat against the cool stone. "Eep! Oh, no, no, no! I'm sorry!"

Mother Hilda rubbed the birches in circles across Agne's buttocks, the friction adding to the building heat. "And so you should be! Mewling like an infant after only two strokes? Shame on you, Sister Agnes. We will have to begin again, from the very beginning. This spanking will not end until you have fully ingrained the virtue of self-control. Now, if I let go of your hands, are you going to cover your bottom again? Or are you ready to trust and obey?"

Agnes felt two tear drops spilling down her cheeks, pooling on the stone floor. "I will obey! I'll do better, Mother Superior! Please give me another chance!"

Mother Hilda released Agnes's wrists. "Then fold your hands in front of you, as if in prayer for supplication…"

Hilda set down the birches and clapped Agnes's thighs. "And spread your legs to rest your weight more securely. Oh, come now, I've diapered plenty an orphaned bottom. You've nothing to hide that I haven't seen before."

Unable to form words, Agnes could only manage a tearful snort as she spread her legs, and finally found her center of balance atop the wooden stool. Mother Hilda patted Agnes' backside with motherly tenderness, before scooping up the birch bundle and standing back up. "That's better…Now, listen carefully to my words, and heed my counsel…"

Mother Hilda tapped Agnes' bottom with the birch bundle, thrice, before stroking each buttock to lift it slightly, exposing the pale sit-spots hidden underneath the puppyfat of Agnes' lower bottom. "...The Apostle Paul teaches us to pray without ceasing. Instead of thinking only of the pains of the flesh, I want you to concentrate your mind on your Father in Heaven, and thank him for both his justice, and his mercy. With each stroke, offer up a prayer of repentance. Repeat after me, 'Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.'"

Agnes nodded and repeated the prayer, word for word, her voice tremulous. As she craned her neck, she caught sight of a small wooden crucifix on the wall before her. "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned."

Mother Hilda swung a practice stroke, just hard enough to keep Agnes's attention. "Very good. Next, entreat him to grant you the gift of courage and long-suffering endurance. You may speak the prayer in your own words, from the heart!"

Agnes's lip quivered as she kept her eyes fixed on the image of Christ. As she thought about the agony of her Savior on the cross, the suffering servant, she knew her pains were nothing in comparison. The soft sting across her bottom seemed to fade. "Please, Lord, give me strength. Help me persevere, until the end…and likewise, grant Mother Hilda the strength she needs, to chastise me soundly. Let the pain of every stroke I feel act as a refining fire, to forge my soul."

As Agnes finished her prayer, she exhaled, and with a sense of purpose, angled her hips forward, gracefully lifting her bottom higher to offer a wide-open target.

Mother Hilda smiled as she tapped the birches against Agnes's newly exposed sit-spots, which she knew from experience were the most delicate, sensitive regions of the buttocks. "Well spoken. Now you must repeat that prayer, silently, within the private corridors of your heart, after each and every stroke of the birch. Are you ready, Little Sister?"

Sniffling, Agnes nodded her head. "Yes, Mother Superior."

As Mother Hilda raised the birches high, Agnes felt the tension in the air, before the first blow struck home, with full force. Agnes clutched her fingers tight in prayer, until her knuckles went pale white, and yelled, before bowing her head in prayer. She twisted her feet, but with an effort, she managed to resist the urges to either cover herself, or run for cover.

Agnes began to repeat the words of her silent prayer, before she became aware of a set of fresh, itching welts rising in thin lines, stretching all along her buttocks. As Agnes seethed, she became dimly aware of the meaning of the phrase, “The tickle of the birch.” Countless times, young Agnes had been threatened with a “tickling.” Before that moment, Agnes had always understood the threat to be a dark jest, even when she felt a single birch switch. But now, Agnes felt the painful, literal reality: the red marks tickled her flesh, until she felt a mad desire to clutch her buttocks with both hands and rub the nagging, tingling itch.

No sooner Agnes became conscious of the Devil’s temptation, and her need to continue praying than the second blow landed with trembling force.

Earlier, her first yell had been conscious, a way of releasing the tension she felt before the first stroke. But this time, despite her best efforts not to raise her voice again, Agnes screamed, from deep within her chest. This time, her hands and feet twitched feebly. Agnes twisted her splayed fingers across one another, while curling and uncurling her toes. Anything to distract her mind from the burning, chafing set of stripes.

Mother Hilda aimed the third blow slightly lower, below the previous set of marks. It landed squarely across Agnes’s sit-spots, partially covering her upper-thighs as well. Agnes screeched until her voice cracked, then sank her head to rest on her forearms, her belly heaving as she gulped for air.

Mother Hilda flinched at the shrill sound. “Courage, Sister. You’ve endured the first three strokes as bravely as can be expected. But you’ve still ten to go. Take a moment to catch your breath, and keep praying.”

Agnes snuffed, and felt her nose clog, before blubbering incoherently, half-way between pleading for “More” and “No more.” What came out sounded like: “Moooooooh!”

As Agnes’s bottom twisted atop the stool, her rumpled shift succumbed to gravity, and flopped down to partially cover her hindquarters. Still wailing with agony, Agnes was completely oblivious.

With a sigh, Mother Hilda knelt by Agnes’s side, and produced a handkerchief, gently brushing away two tear drops before pressing it against Agnes’s nose.. “I can’t understand a word you’re saying. Here, blow your nose.”

Agnes felt a snot bubble pop at the end of her nose, before she pressed her face against the handkerchief and honked. Mother Hilda set the handkerchief down in front of Agnes, and cradled her chin. “There, can you breathe, dear?”

Agnes inhaled sharply through her nose, and calmed her rapid breathing. “Yes, Mother Superior.”

Mother Hilda reached into her satchel, and produced an apple. “If you keep up that caterwauling, you’ll risk biting your tongue off. Here, try sinking your teeth into this. It’s a trick old Mother Esther taught me, when I was in a similar…position.”

Agnes glanced at the red apple, skeptically. At the moment, it looked strangely succulent, but she wasn’t sure how it would help. “But…what if I can’t breathe? Or if you ask me a question and I need to answer you?”

Clicking her tongue, Mother Hilda bounced the apple in her palm. “Tut, tut! You don’t need any more lecturing. All you need right now is more spanking. Trust me, it helps to have something to chew on. And if you feel your nose starting to clog again, just spit it out. I’ll give you plenty of time between each stroke, so keep breathing, and…gird your loins.”

For emphasis, Mother Hilda patted Agnes’s bottom playfully, fluffing the fabric of the skirt. Suddenly realizing her clothing was out of place for a spanking, Agnes quickly grabbed her skirts and hauled them all the way to her shoulders, exposing her breasts to the cool air. Feeling claustrophobic, Agnes pulled her arms free of her habit and folded her hands in front of her. The woolen habit felt like a warm, fuzzy scarf all around her blushing face, in sharp contrast to the chill Agnes felt as she realized that below the neckline, she was entirely naked.

Then Mother Hilda offered up the apple, pressing it gently against Agnes’s lips. “Good girl. Now, open wide.”

Scrunching her face, Agnes shook her head. She expected Mother Hilda to strike her, or at least censure her, but the abbess only waited, holding the apple steady. Finally, as the smell of the apple became intoxicating, Agnes silently ordered herself to trust in her Mother Superior’s wisdom. Agnes opened her mouth wide, and accepted the apple, feeling like a stuffed pig at a Holy Feast.

Mother Hilda nodded, and playfully squeezed Agnes’s cheeks to ensure she had a good grip on the apple. “As Eve, the mother of all mankind, ate of the forbidden fruit, so too have we her daughters all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God. And though you must yet endure further torment, as the just payment for your deeds, know that as God forgave Eve, and made for her garments of fur, so too shall you be clothed in clean garments, and made new. I chastise your buttocks here on earth, so that I may yet see your soul saved in heaven. Remember that, as I finish your first whipping.”

Mother Hilda pressed the birches against Agnes’s bottom, and she knew for certain her ordeal was about to begin again. The juice was so sweet, Agnes felt two fresh tears dampening her eyelashes. With her cheeks stuffed, Agnes could only nod and mumble. “Mm-hmm!”

The fourth stroke landed, every bit as ferocious as the first three. But as Agnes felt the fresh wave of pain, she dug her teeth into the apple, and felt a strange sense of comfort as she heard

it muffle her shout. Eyes wide, Agnes resolutely held her position across the stool, and began to pray. She endured the fifth and sixth stroke without so much as twitching.

As Mother Hilda paused to examine her work, she nodded with approval, and strolled to Agnes's opposite side, switching her grip on the birch bundle to use her other hand. Grateful for the momentary reprieve, Agnes glanced behind her, and realized that either Mother Hilda's arm was getting tired, or she just wanted a new angle to cover some unmarked territory. As Agnes closed her eyes, she formed a mental picture of her own buttocks in her imagination, each of the red marks clearly impressed on her mind. With a pang of humiliation, Agnes reflected that she could picture the scene as clearly as if it were a map being held to her face: the rolling hills represented her pale buttocks, while the birch marks were represented by a vast forest of trees, their autumn leaves dyed red.

As Agnes reflected on this image, the seventh stroke caught her by surprise, and she struggled to repeat her silent prayer instead.

But by the eighth stroke, the cumulative effect of the birches began to take their toll. Agnes's vision blurred, before she felt her tears spilling freely down her face, and shut her eyes tight. She took a rattling breath through her nose, and to her relief she felt she could still breathe easily.

Listening carefully, Mother Hilda waited until she heard Agnes take three deep, clear breaths, before aiming the ninth blow with a full swing of her arm. As Hilda delivered the blow, she imagined trying to swing the birch bundle *through* her Agnes' helpless buttocks. Two of the birch branches snapped from the force of the impact, and flew across the room.

Agnes tried to clench her jaw, and would have bitten off a clean bite, if Mother Hilda had not wedged it so firmly in place from the start. Digging her feet into the ground, Agnes tried to shriek, sending spittle flying past the apple. Mother Hilda paused, watching Agnes's bottom hover above the stool, until Agnes caught her breath, and held herself steady.

Then Mother Hilda aimed the tenth stroke across Agnes's sit spots, leaving a fresh set of marks in a mirror image to the earlier set. Agnes prayed, chanting the words, "Holy Virgin Mary! Help me! Help me!" over and over again in her mind, until she started to mumble the words past the apple pressed against her lips.

Agnes's knees trembled, then gave out. As her foot slipped against the smooth stone, Agnes dropped her weight back down onto the stool with a bump, before she sank fully, no longer able to hold her weight up. With a crunch, Agnes bit down clean through the apple. As the rest of the apple bounced across the floor and away from her, Agnes wailed, letting the chunk of apple she'd bitten off drop from her lips along with a trail of drool.

Mother Hilda paused. "Sister Agnes, can you breathe?"

Agnes only snarled, and clawed at the woolen habit that cloaked her face. “Grrraahr!”

With a sharp tug, Agnes yanked the habit off her head with a pop, half pulling her veil free along with it, letting curls of her flaming red hair tumble free. Half-tempted to rip off her veil and throw it in the Mother Superior’s face, Agnes dug her fingers into her scalp, holding fast to the veil. “Damn me! Just…damn me to Hell!”

Mother Hilda pursed her lips, weighing whether this profanity required additional punishment. Over the years, Mother Hilda had learned that administering chastisement was more of an art than a science. Usually, a willful child required the firm hand of correction, but Hilda decided that what Agnes needed now was the gentle hand of guidance. “No, Sister Agnes. So long as you wish to fulfill your vows, I will not cast you out. And even if you wish to leave the abbey, you need not be damned for it. Whatever path you choose in life, you can choose to walk that path faithfully. Do you wish to remain in our order?”

Hiding her face behind her hands, Agnes melted into sobs. “...Y-yes! Huh..Puh-please! Yessss…”

Mother Hilda bent low, and pulled the veil away from Agnes’s face, with insistence. “Then let’s have no more grumbling! You’ve only three whacks to go.”

Agnes tensed as she felt her veil being pulled free, and clung to it for dear life. “No! I want to be a good nun! Let me stay with you! Don’t take my veil!”

Using her free hand, Hilda planted a swat across Agnes’s bottom, but the gesture was more playful than punitive. “Heavens, child, I’m just setting it aside so it’s not in the way. Your hair is already in shambles. Really, you had a monstrous temper when you were young. I thought we’d spanked that anger out of you, but it seems to be an indwelling sin.”

As Agnes felt the love tap, she squeaked, and accidentally flopped forward, knocking over the stool. Slowly picking herself up, Agnes realized she was naked, and as she blinked, she also realized her eyes were dry and puffy from crying. Then she sniveled, and released her grip on the veil, clasping her hands in front of her as she knelt on her knees. “I’m sorry…I’m a wicked girl…I’m sorry for being bad…”

Mother Hilda folded Agnes’ shift, veil and habit neatly, along with her stockings and shoes, before turning to embrace Agnes’s nude form, patting the back of her head. “Ah, there, there, child…you’re not the first sister to earn herself a sore bottom, and you won’t be the last.”

Agnes pressed her face against Hilda’s belly, and clung tight to the abbess’s skirts as she wiped her eyes. “I’ll be good! I’ll be a righteous bride of Christ! I’ll never sin again! Never, ever!”

“Now, now! I’m sure you’ll do better. And perhaps you will fall into sin again. If you do…just bring your wicked little bottom straight to my cell to confess your trespasses, and I’ll correct you. But

trust not in your own strength, little lamb. Rather, trust in the strength of your shepherd, who will not fail to seek out his lost sheep, and guide you home."

Mother Hilda bent low to kiss Agnes on the top of her head, then reached around to clap both of Agnes's butt-cheeks, cupping them firmly in her gnarled, calloused hands. "And don't worry…I know you didn't leave your position out of hard-hearted obstinance. So, I won't start your birching all over from the beginning. Just this once, I will only add two penalty strokes to the total. And if you don't want another spanking for being a stubborn ass…you'd best get that arse back into position across the stool. Now."

Agnes scampered on all fours to find the stool, slammed it down, and practically dove across it to offer up her throbbing, aching buttocks, like Abel's choice meat on the sacrificial altar. Agnes dug her fingers into the seat of the stool, glancing behind her to see if her submission was acceptable.

To Agnes's astonishment, Mother Hilda giggled like a little girl. "Not so stiffly, child. Settle your weight down…and spread your legs wide."

Biting her tongue to resist her urge to argue, Agnes relaxed and spread her legs, feeling a bead of sweat dripping down her butt crack, until it tickled her fully-exposed, rose-pink ass hole.

Agnes winced as she set her chin down against the hard stone floor, but she couldn't force herself to release her grip on the legs of the stool.

Mother Hilda shook her head as she strolled in front of Agnes to retrieve the birch bundles. "That position is going to be almost impossible to hold. I suggest you rest your chin on your hands."

Unable to take her eyes off the birches, Agnes shook her head. "Please, Mother…I believe I can best hold myself still, just like this…if you will permit me?"

Mother Hilda shrugged. "Very well. But if you scrape your chin, on your own head be it. You had three more to go, and now you've got an additional two, for leaving position. That's five total, so I propose we do this more quickly, and have done with it. Take a deep breath, and tell me when you're ready. Then I'll finish tanning your hide, quick as you please."

Feeling decidedly *not* pleased, Agnes dug her finger nails into the stool, and took a shuddering breath. She scrunched her face into a girlish pout, before gazing at the image of the crucifix, and offering up a silent prayer. "...I am ready."

Mother Hilda took careful aim, and delivered five nasty strokes in quick succession. Despite the faster pace, Agnes still had time to appreciate every individual blow. For the first two, Hilda aimed the birch bundle downward, as if delivering a vertical sword stroke. The first caught

Agnes across her left buttock and inner thigh, covering a wide patch of lily-white unmarked flesh with fresh pink stripes. The second blow was aimed at the right buttock, at a similar angle.

Just as Agnes caught her breath, her chin digging against the stone, her buttocks still jerking and jiggling from the impacts, Mother Hilda switched her grip on the birches, as well as the angle of her next stroke.

Though she felt genuine sympathy for Agnes, Hilda was determined to have the last set of five strokes leave a lasting impression. She raised her right hand diagonally to her left ear to fully wind up, then slashed the birch bundle across Agnes's outer left buttock. It was a glancing blow, but the friction of the scratchy bark more than made up for the lessened impact.

As Agnes arched her back, she let out a strangled, guttural cry. "Aaaah-haggh!"

Without pausing, Hilda twisted her wrist, and with a smooth, underhanded stroke, delivered a similar glancing blow to the outer-part of Agnes's right buttock.

At that moment, Agnes finally began to mentally process the fresh, keen sting, in sharp contrast to the numb, lingering ache across the lower-center of her bottom. Taken off guard, she gasped, her chest heaving, her breasts pressed flat against the cool stone, her nipples going stiff.

Then, Mother Hilda aimed a final, downward stroke, right across the center of Agnes's butt crack, snapping another three birch branches. Agnes's anus took the brunt of the impact, and the remainder of the birches scraped across her inner buttocks, leaving behind thin, white scratches that immediately flushed to a mottled pink.

Agnes bellowed, lost her grip on the stool, and flopped forward, her chin slapping against the stone. Agnes took a shaky breath. "...Owwie."

Mother Hilda examined the unbroken twigs that represented the remains of the birch bundle, and tossed it aside. "Oh, dear. Did you hurt your chin after all? Let's have a look child."

Agnes hugged herself reflexively, before remembering her breasts were exposed and clasping them tight to hide her nipples. "Well…y-you d-did…w-warn me!"

Mother Hilda shushed Agnes as she lifted her chin to examine the scrape, then pulled a corked bottle from her satchel. "It isn't bleeding. I'll give you an ointment…hopefully I have enough for your backside, too."

Agnes flinched as she felt Mother Hilda apply the stinging balm to the underside of her chin, then rested her head on the abbess's chest, sticking out her bottom to allow herself to be tended to. The ointment was meant to be an antiseptic, so it was far more stinging than soothing, but as Mother Hilda applied a generous dollop to both of Agnes's butt cheeks, she moaned with relief anyway.

Mother Hilda kneaded Agnes's buttocks like two lumps of dough for a minute, before petting her with tenderness. "You may get dressed, beloved. But do not forget, you still have further trials to face."

Trembling with a mix of fear, and joy, and exhaustion, and relief, Agnes gathered up her clothing and redressed. She felt a curl of hair escape from her veil, and spiraled it around her finger, before letting it bounce back into place.

But the moment Agnes pulled her woolen habit over her head, Mother Hilda pulled out a pin cushion and waved an index finger upward. "Skirts up, Agnes. You will spend the remainder of the day, with your backside fully exposed."

Agnes complied, glancing nervously at her own backside as Mother Hilda secured her skirts in place with a needle. "So…I am to remain here, and meditate on my misconduct?"

Mother Hilda answered by pinching Agnes's lower buttock, then shuffling her toward the exit. "Of course not. You will stand a vigil in the common area, so that all the other nuns will be reminded what happens to foolish drunkards...and thieves."

Agnes held her arms stiff at her sides as she marched, praying no witnesses would be waiting for them in the corridor. "But…haven't I been punished enough? Eep!"

Mother Hilda pinched Agnes's other buttock to force her to speed up to a quick march. "Were it only a matter of simple gluttony or winebibbing, then yes. But you also stole from the abbey cellar, and committed a great sacrilege. By now, every sister in the Abbey will have heard the rumors of your misadventure with Sister Beatrice. And though most of them could probably use a good spanking to warn them against the sin of gossip, the fact remains that, unless your sisters see for themselves that you have been properly dealt with, they are likely to resent you. The entire Abbey needs to see that you have not been let off lightly, with a mere slap on the wrist…for your own sake as much as theirs."

Agnes found herself nodding. Strangely, she took pride in the fact that she had just endured far more than a laughable "slap on the wrist." Agnes quickly performed the sign of the cross, and repented of her private prideful thoughts. "There is wisdom in that, but perhaps…you could simply tell them, rather than…*show* them?"

As Agnes was marched through the cloisters, they passed by a group of three young oblates, who bowed respectfully to the Mother Superior, before glancing curiously at Agnes.

Agnes clenched her bottom, willing for it to remain hidden from view, at least for one moment longer. That hope was dashed as she heard a childish squeal, followed by fits of

giggles. One of the girls doubled back to catch up with them. “Mother Superior, what’s wrong with her habit?”

Mother Hilda grabbed Agnes by the shoulders and twisted her around, to reveal her full, blood-red moon to the delighted girls. “Ah, I’m afraid Sister Agnes has been very naughty. So I had to be sharp with her. Go on, Sister Agnes. Tell them what you did.”

Agnes grimaced as she heard the girls fail to suppress their titters of laughter behind her, then straightened her posture as best she could. “I…I snuck into the cellar to drink communion wine, to the point of inebriation…I am a thief, and a drunkard. And I am thankful to have received this most just correction.”

The three girls broke into howls of laughter, doubling over. One flopped onto her back and kicked her feet, gasping for air as she pointed at Agnes’s bare buttocks. Agnes pouted. *“Surely, I was never such an airhead, when I was their age,”* she mused.

One of the oblates wiped tears from her eyes and grinned wickedly at Mother Hilda. “Is Sister Agnes going to get another spanking today? Perhaps as a show for supper?”

Mother Hilda clapped a hand across Agnes’ bottom with a cupped hand. Agnes squeaked with surprise, but as she felt Mother Hilda’s hand brushing her gently, she realized the resounding clap had been meant more for show than to add fresh pain. Nevertheless, it was more than enough to remind Agnes the lingering ache from her previous punishment. Mother Hilda patted Agnes’s bottom pointedly, glaring at the three stunned oblates. “Sister Agnes may well have to endure another flogging, assuming she is recalcitrant. Much will depend on her demonstrating a repentant heart, and submitting to the will of her elders…a lesson you would do well to remember.”

The three girls nodded, stammering. “Yeh-yes, Mother Superior.”

“Sister Agnes will be standing in the refectory for the rest of the day to meditate. She will need to focus her mind entirely on praying for the gift of repentance, and guidance. Do me a favor, and inform the rest of the oblates that Sister Agnes is not to be disturbed…unless any of you wish to join her.”

All three oblates clutched their bottoms, shaking their heads wildly. Two shouted, “No, Mother Superior!” while one shouted, “Yes, Mother Superior!” Then they all changed their answers, talking over one another before Mother Hilda barked at them. “That will do. Be off with you!”

Two of the oblates bumped into each other, as the third darted away. She tripped on her habit, before the other two caught up, and all three sprinted to the oblates’ chambers.

Mother Hilda wore a mysterious smile as she led Sister Agnes to the refectory, a simple stone room with wooden beams, and a small altar. Once there, Agnes was made to kneel before the wooden crucifix. Agnes winced as she accidentally rested her weight on her bottom, before jerking up to let it hover above her feet. As Agnes folded her hands in prayer, she was painfully aware of how even the smallest moment caused her lingering welts to stretch. “Mother Hilda, will Sister Beatrice be joining me?”

“I have not made up my mind on a suitable punishment for Sister Beatrice yet. Or even if she should remain a sister at this abbey. She is much older than you, and wilfully led you astray…I am reminded of the words of the Savior. ‘It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.’”

Agnes felt her heart freeze at the thought of being cast into the sea, before being pulled to the depths. “Thank you again, Mother Superior, for offering me a chance to redeem myself. I will work hard to be worthy of your trust in me.”

Mother Hilda bent low, and kissed Agnes on each of her cheeks. “You are welcome, Sister. But always remember, you do not need to work to earn my love. I love you as I would my own daughter: because you are God’s gift to me. And you already have been redeemed. As the wise merchant sells all he has to redeem the pearl of great price, so too are you cherished by your redeemer, who suffered on your behalf. I pray you will find gladness, and pray with gratitude, as you meditate on these things.”

Agnes returned the kiss, her eyes shining. “Yes, Mother.”

Mother Hilda stood, and quickly wiped a tear from her eye. “A brief period of fasting will help you concentrate your mind on God’s mercy and grace. Therefore, you will not be joining us for supper tonight. When the other nuns arrive, keep your position at the altar, and if any of them mock or speak cruelly of you, pay them no heed. And keep your bottom fully bare, until the moment I come to release you.”

Agnes smiled. “Thank you, Mother. I will obey. ”

As Mother Hilda marched away, Agnes was left alone at the altar. She wept softly, but only for a few minutes, before she began to pray earnestly. She confessed every private sin she could remember, pleaded for forgiveness, and finally entreated on behalf of Sister Beatrice, that she might be granted the grace of a repentant heart, and the mercy of forgiveness.

Anges heard the great wooden doors thudding open behind her, and knew from the murmurs and whispers that the entire population of the abbey was gathering in the refectory

for supper. Even without turning to look, Agnes could feel all eyes in the room gazing at her buttocks. As long as Agnes remained on such prominent display, front and center before the altar, no one could possibly miss getting a glimpse of her thoroughly trounced tushie.

Ignoring the rising laughter and jeers, Agnes fixed her eyes on the wooden crucifix. “Lord…please, I beg of you, show me the path to greater wisdom and courage. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit…amen.”

End of Chapter 2